

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 NASA-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00
NSAE-00 NSCE-00 SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 PM-04 H-01
INR-07 L-03 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 EB-07
TRSE-00 OC-06 CCO-00 /076 W
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O 081818Z JUN 77

FM AMEMBASSY VICTORIA

TO SECSTATE NIACT IMMEDIATE 404

INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY PORT LOUIS

AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 VICTORIA 00321

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PINT, ECON, MASS, SE

SUBJECT: SEYCHELLES COUP D'ETAT: RENE GIVES - WIDE RANGING PRESS CON-
FERENCE

SUMMARY: "PRESIDENT" RENE", IN FOURTH DAY IN POWER, GAVE HOUR-LONG
JUNE 8 PRESS CONFERENCE FOR VISITING FOREIGN AND LOCAL JOURNALISTS.
EXCERPTS OF APPROXIMATELY HALF OF QUESTION AND ANSWER FORMAT CONFER-
ENCE WERE BROADCAST 8 HOURS LATER. IN HIS RESPONSES, RENE RE-
ITERATED EARLIER PLEDGE TO HONOR ALL AGREEMENTS (SPECIFICALLY INCLUD-
ING TRACKING STATION) INDICATED TOUGHER LINE AGAINST SOUTH AFRICA AND
SAID SEYCHELLES WOULD REMAIN IN COMMONWEALTH. ON DOMESTIC FRONT HE
SAID THAT HIS GOVERNMENT WOULD MOVE "SLIGHTLY" TO THE LEFT, REORGANIZE
ITSELF AND ATTACK HOUSING PROBLEM. HE INDICATED SOME PRIVATELY
OWNED LAND WOULD BE BOUGHT BY GOVERNMENT AT FAR LESS THAN
CURRENT MARKET VALUE. HE PROMISED NEW CONSTITUTION WOULD BE FORTHCO-
MING AND ELECTIONS HELD BEFORE 1979. FOR FIRST TIME, HE TACITLY
ADMITTED PRIOR KNOWLEDGE OF COUP BUT DUCKED ISSUE OF FOREIGN
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SUPPORT. HE CHARGED MANCHAM WITH ATTEMPTING TO RECRUIT MERCENARY
FORCE BUT SAID HIS SUPPORTERS WOULD REMAIN VIGILANT. FINALLY,
RENE INDICATED PRESIDENTIAL STYLE IN SHARP CONTRAST TO MANCHAM'S
FLAMBOYANCE.
END SUMMARY

1. BACKGROUND OF COUP D'ETAT - ON QUESTION HIS PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

OF PENDING COUP ATTEMPT, RENE RESPONDED "TO BE HONEST I KNEW THEY WERE PLANNING SOMETHING". HE TURNED ASIDE ALL QUESTIONS ON WHERE PERPETRATORS OF COUP WERE TRAINED OR SOURCES OF THEIR WEAPONS. HE REITERATED HIS ALLEGED UNHAPPINESS WITH MANCHAM'S SUGGESTION TO POSTPONE ELECTIONS, ADDING NEW INFORMATION THAT HE WAS OFFERED SALARY

INCREASE AND OTHER MEMBER OF HIS PARTY GOT OFFERS OF BRIBES AND MINISTRIES IN EXPANDED CABINET. RENE ADDED THAT WHEN HE PROTESTED ABOUT PROPOSED ELECTION POSTPONEMENT MANCHAM'S RESPONSE WAS "YOU KNOW I CAN SUSPEND THE CONSTITUTION AND GET ON WITH IT MYSELF". RENE SAID COUP WAS CARRIED OUT BY HIS SUPPORTERS WHO WERE "GRIEVED" BY FACT THAT MANCHAM WAS VIOLATING CONSTITUTION. RENE DENIED EXISTENCE OF A "BLACK LIST" OF MANCHAM SUPPORTERS, SAYING THERE WOULD NEVER BE ONE UNDER HIS GOVERNMENT. HE SAID ARMED CIVILIANS WOULD BE DISBANDED WHEN PRESENT "PERIOD OF STRAIN" IS OVER. HE ADDED THAT HE HAS RECEIVED

REPORTS THAT MANCHAM IS ORGANIZING MERCENARY FORCE AND THAT CONSEQUENTLY LARGE NUMBERS OF HIS YOUNG SUPPORTERS WERE UNDERGOING TRAINING BY POLICE. (COMMENT: LOCAL AMERICAN SOURCE CONFIRMS FIRING EXERCISES CARRIED OUT JUNE 8 IN REMOTE AREA.) RENE ALSO SAID HE WAS PREPARED TO ASK FOR EXTERNAL ASSISTANCE IN EVENT MERCENARY ATTACK.

2. EXTERNAL POLICIES - IN REPLY TO QUESTION ON FUTURE OF USAF TRACKING STATION, RENE SAID " NOTHING WILL CHANGE AT ALL" AND REITERATED GOVERNMENT WILL HONOR ALL AGREEMENTS. ON SEYCHELLES COMMERCIAL TIES WITH SOUTH AFRICA HE SAID GOVERNMENT WOULD NOT ENCOURAGE EXPANSION OF TRADE BUT WOULD CONTINUE TO WELCOME SOUTH CONFIDENTIAL

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AFRICAN TOURISTS (HE HAD NOTHING AGAINST INDIVIDUALS) AND THAT SOUTH AFRICAN AIRWAYS COULD CONTINUE TO USE SEYCHELLES AIRPORT. AT SAME TIME, SEYCHELLES WOULD JOIN OTHERS IN CONDEMNING SOUTH AFRICAN RACIAL POLICIES IN ORDER HELP CHANGE "BARBARIC ATTITUDE" PREVAILING THERE. WITH RESPECT TO DIPLOMATIC RECOGNITION, HE SAID NO COUNTRY HAD AS YET RECOGNIZED HIS GOVERNMENT BUT HE HAS RECEIVED MANY CONGRATULATORY MESSAGES. HE CONFIRMED HIS DESIRE TO REMAIN IN COMMONWEALTH AND WOULD BE SENDING SOMEONE (MAYBE HIMSELF) TO JULY OAU SUMMIT IN LIBREVILLE.

3. INTERNAL POLICIES - RENE SAID HE FAVORED ESTABLISHMENT OF INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER TO ASSIST IN KEEPING PEOPLE INFORMED AND CORRECT GOVERNMENTAL MISTAKES. WHEN ASKED IF HIS REGIME WILL MOVE LEFTWARD, RENE REPLIED THAT HIS GOVERNMENT "WILL MOVE SLIGHTLY TO THE LEFT" BECAUSE PREVIOUS ONE WAS SO FAR TO THE RIGHT. HE CITED HOUSING SHORTAGE AS MOST PRESSING PROBLEM, SAYING ALL RESOURCES WILL BE DEVOTED TO THIS AREA. SECOND

PRIORITY WAS REORGANIZATION OF GOVERNMENT SO THAT DEVELOPMENT PLAN
COULD
BE EFFICIENTLY IMPLEMENTED. ON HIS TOURISM POLICY,
RENE SAID TOURISM AS MAJOR FOREIGN EXCHANGE EARNER, WOULD CONTINUE TO

BE PROMOTED. ON KEY LAND ISSUE, HE SAID HE DOES NOT WANT TO "CONFISCA
TE"
LAND BUT LAND SPECULATION HAS INFLATED PRICES "10-15 TIMES ITS VALUE"
AND THAT OWNERS MAY BE OBLIGED TO SELL TO GOVERNMENT FOR "FAIR PRICE
BASED ON CURRENT RETURN". HE PROMISED FRESH ELECTIONS BEFORE JUNE 1979

- SINCE COUP MOUNTED OVER THIS ISSUE - BUT NOT BEFORE NEW CONSTITUTION

WRITTEN BY "INDEPENDENT COMMISSION". RENE HELD OUT POSSIBILITY THAT
NATIONAL REFERENDUM WOULD BE HELD TO RATIFY CONSTITUTION. RENE ALSO
SAID ALL RELIGIOUS GROUPS COULD FUNCTION FREELY, AND THAT HE FELT
CONFIDENT HE COULD CONTROL THOSE WHO HAD PROPELLED HIM TO POWER.
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FINALLY, RENE CONFIRMED THAT INDEPENDENCE CELEBRATIONS WOULD TAKE
PLACE ON JUNE 29 WITH POPULAR FESTIVALS AND REJOICING RATHER THAN
STATE BALL AND PRESIDENTIAL RECEPTION.

4. MISCELLANEOUS - RENE DISAVOWED KNOWLEDGE THAT ANY FOREIGN VESSELS
WERE PATROLLING NEAR SEYCHLLES. HE NOTED THAT USN SHIP WAS SCHEDULED
TO CALL JUNE 6 BUT THAT AMERICANS HAD "KINDLY OFFERED" TO CANCEL
VISIT TO AVOID ANY UNFORTUNATE MISINTERPRETATIONS.
(THOUGH NOT BROADCAST IN EXCERPTS, JOURNALISTS TOLD ME RENE ALSO
EXPRESSED APPRECIATION FOR CANCELLATION). HE HELD OUT POSSIBILITY
MANCHAM MIGHT ONE DAY BE PERMITTED TO RETURN. FINALLY, HE SAID HE
WOULD LIVE IN HIS OWN HOME RATHER THAN STATE HOUSE (LIKE OTHER
SEYCHELLOIS), AND USE PRESIDENTIAL ROLLS-ROYCE FOR STATE VISITORS
ONLY.

5. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH SUBSTANCE OF MANY OF RENE'S REMARKS MUST BE

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TAKEN WITH LARGE GRAIN OF SALT, CONFERENCE WAS VIRTUOSO PERFORMANCE BY EXPERIENCED, ARTICULATE-AND, BY ACCOUNTS THOSE PRESENT. CONFIDENT AND RELAXED POLITICIAN. AS WAS THE CASE IN HIS JUNE 6 AND 7 SPEECHES, RENE SOUGHT TO PROJECT IMAGE OF THOUGHTFUL AND CONCERNED POLITICAN WHO IS SEEKING, IN MEASURED WAY, TO REDRESS PASS INEQUITIES IN SEYCHELLES SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC LIFE. HIS AUDIENCE WAS APPARENTLY IMPRESSED AND REPORTING OVERSEAS IS LIKELY TO BE COMPLIMENTARY TOWARDS HIM. WHILE THE MIX OF IDEOLOGY AND PRAGMATISM IN RENE'S MAKE UP IS STILL TO BE REVEALED, HIS STATEMENTS AND TONE WERE REASSURING TO REPORTERS EARLIER EXPOSED TO THE MANY DOCTRINE, SELF-PROCLAIMED MARXISTS PRESENTLY SURROUNDING HIM.

6. DUE TO PROPAGATION DIFFICULTIES TRANSMISSION OF THIS MESSAGE DELAYED TEN HOURS.
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